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Statement submitted by Friends of Africa International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

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Statement

Keeping our promises to future generations: achieving gender equality in the midst of a global economic crisis

The global recession has drastically reduced the capacity of Governments, international institutions, businesses and non-governmental organizations to safeguard human rights and achieve development goals. The shrinking of foreign aid has caused development workers to fear that such objectives as the Millennium Development Goal of gender equality cannot be achieved within their previously determined timelines. Unfortunately, the common response to this problem is that there is simply not enough time, resources or political willpower to address gender equality, given current circumstances.

Gender equality should not be a luxury that is available only during good economic times. It is a safeguard against threats to human rights in a volatile and uncertain world.

African women have become visible agents in development endeavours and have increased their participation in human rights and other activities. While discussion on conflict is still dominated by men, the consequences of conflict disproportionately affect women, regardless of their social and economic status.

If we do not commit to achieving gender equality, future generations will suffer the consequences of our failure to provide them with a more suitable world. A generation of young girls will be forced to leave school in order to work or take care of their families. More young women will be pressured into lives of conflict and violence, having few other alternatives.

As development workers committed to human rights and social justice, we cannot let this happen. It does not have to, especially if we focus our efforts where they will have the greatest impact. Based on experiences with my own organization, Friends of Africa International, I believe that we can place great hope in Africa's youth.

The organization's mission is to promote human rights and rebuild failed institutions throughout Africa. Our work is focused on providing young people, particularly young African women, with the education and training necessary to defend human rights and democracy in their communities. We have witnessed the vast capacity of young people to positively affect their future. Africa's youth are the key to long-term success in achieving development goals, including gender equality.

Young women will be on a more equal footing with young men if they receive the same education and employment opportunities. If we ensure that they are equally engaged in the social and political spheres through access to voting and participation in electoral processes, we will ensure that institutions become more representative of women in the future. The integration of women in decision-making at all levels is an integral component in fulfilling both the mandate of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), and Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals.

The current economic crisis is not an excuse for inaction, or an insurmountable obstacle, or a reason to retreat on earlier promises. Demonstrating to young girls that we are committed to defending their right to be treated as equals will give them the confidence they need as equals and the courage to defend that equality in the

future. Our commitment to empowering them today is an investment with immeasurable long-term benefits for the future of gender equality and all human rights.